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Bills on rail safety, Rx drugs and children's health care sent to Governor's desk

Governor Schwarzenegger has until October 9 to sign all bills.

Children's Health Care

Assembly Bills 772 and 1199, authored by Assembly Majority Leader Dario Frommer (D-Glendale) and Assemblywoman Wilma Chan (D-Oakland) would ensure that every child in California could see a doctor when they're sick. The legislation would create the California Healthy Kids program, which would streamline existing programs like Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for children to help enroll eligible uninsured children, provide health insurance options to insure all other uninsured children and create the California Healthy Kids Fund, which will accept public and private donations and seek matching funds from the federal government to help fund the health coverage for children.

Military Families Financial Relief Act

Assembly Bill 1666 will provide financial relief to the families of and members of the Reserves or National Guard, if that service

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Frommer hosts special hearing on rail safety after Glendale Metrolink crash

Assembly Majority Leader is appointed chairman of new Assembly Special Committee on Rail Safety.

(GLENDALE, CA) -- Assembly Majority Leader Dario Frommer (D-Glendale) joined victims and victims' families of the recent Glendale Metrolink derailment, law enforcement representatives and state and federal agencies in July to discuss the issue of passenger rail safety in California, specifically focusing on Metrolink's practice of using "push-pull configurations" for trains.

After a Metrolink train derailed in Glendale during January, killing 11 and injuring 200, Frommer requested that Speaker Fabian Nuñez (D-Los Angeles) create a new Assembly Special Committee on Passenger Rail Safety. Frommer was appointed by the Speaker as chair of this new committee.



"California has one of the nation's worst records of rail safety, and our initial investigations have revealed evidence that state and federal agencies have been asleep at the switch," Frommer said. "This committee will look at how we can prevent the tragic losses and damages suffered during the Glendale Metrolink crash."

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lasts for a period of at least 30 consecutive days, by making several allowances, including: allowing the service member, spouse or legal dependent to terminate a cell phone contract; allowing for a tuition credit or tuition refund for a student in good academic standing of a community college or CSU and asks the UC Regents to adopt the same policies; waiving the annual state Bar fees as long as the service member is in full-time active duty; and prohibiting residential heating and electricity stoppages for the families of full-time active duty service members.

Rail Safety Act

Frommer's AB 1067 would increase penalties for drivers who violate rail crossing laws. The bill would make it a crime for any person to unlawfully or through gross negligence obstruct a railroad and cause damage, derailment or injuries to passengers. In addition, violators could be fined up to \$2,500, nearly double the existing penalty.

California Hope Endowment

Sponsored by Treasurer Angelides, Assembly Bill 593 by Frommer will create the California Hope Endowment for higher education. The endowment would operate like a charitable foundation, independent of individual college systems but working in concert with them. The endowment could accept donations from corporations, individuals and foundations to supplement its assets.

To help fund the endowment, AB 593 would create the CalHope Trust, shifting a portion of the real estate owned by the state government to a public trust corporation that would manage it like a business and earn returns from it for the endowment.

Affordable Prescription Drugs

Assembly Bill 73, which would provide information on a state Web site to consumers about international pharmacies that meet state standards for safety and accessibility that sell prescription drugs for 40% to 75% less. Assembly Bill 76, which would allow California to consolidate drug purchasing for state programs to negotiate for lower drug prices.

Hospital Chargemaster

Assembly Bill 1045 requires hospitals provide the public information regarding the price of whole procedures rather than itemized lists of different costs, information that would eventually be available on the Web site of the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development. In addition, the bill gives a patient the right to receive an estimate of the patient's expected cost of hospital care when the patient is admitted to the hospital. ♦

According to the California Highway Patrol, there have been a total of 717 train collisions, with more than 600 victims either injured or killed since 2001. California ranks 5th in the nation for public grade crossing accidents and fatalities, second in the nation for rail fatalities and first in the nation for pedestrian fatalities.

The hearing's focus included Metrolink's practice of using "push-pull configuration," the practice of placing the heavy locomotive at the rear of a train, where it then "pushes" the lighter passenger cabs as it heads one way on the track and "pulls" the lighter passenger cabs on the way back. There are allegations that pushed trains are more likely to derail because the lighter passenger cabs in the front can be pushed off the tracks more easily.

The committee heard testimony from victims and victims' families of the crash, local law enforcement officials who were first responders at the derailment, the Federal Rail Administration, California Department of Transportation, Metrolink and other state transit agencies. In light of the terrorist attacks on public transit in London, the Governor's Office of Homeland Security testified regarding the security of California's passenger rail systems. In addition, the committee heard extensive testimony on the issue of how well California rail safety is being funded through state and federal funds.

The Assembly Special Committee on Rail Safety also includes Assemblymembers Joe Coto (D-San Jose), Sharon Runner (R-Lancaster), Ron Calderon (D-Montebello), Dennis Mountjoy (R-Monrovia), Karen Bass (D-Los Angeles), Rudy Bermudez (D-Norwalk) and Jenny Oropeza (D-Los Angeles). ♦

CONTACT US

DISTRICT OFFICE

620 NORTH BRAND BOULEVARD, SUITE 403

GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA 91203

(818) 240-6330

(818) 240-4632 (FAX)

CAPITOL OFFICE

PO BOX 942849

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 94249-0043

(916) 319-2043

(916) 319-2143 (FAX) Online

<http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a43/>

Assemblymember.Frommer@assembly.ca.gov